

exposing the moral self in Montenegro: the use of natural definitions to keep ethnography descriptive

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In this paper two arguments are made, at the same time disparate yet closely related. One is substantive: I believe there exists a moral self in every culture, a psychic entity integral to the functioning of the moral system. The other argument pertains to how we practice anthropology as a science or quasi-science. I explore the question: Is it possible to ascertain whether or not our ethnographic descriptions of subjective, inner layers of human experience are ever even reasonably "correct"? The methodological problem which generates such epistemological skepticism is, of course, that the instruments for such "scientific measurement" must be devised by subjective, biased human beings, and to a considerable extent the instruments themselves are those same beings. For social anthropologists and others who work across cultures, this epistemological problem is exacerbated by the fact that largely correct assumptions of a psychic unity for mankind (Wallace 1961) tempt us to interpret exotic beliefs and behaviors in familiar terms. Yet, as an adult cultural outsider arriving in the field to participate as well as to observe, one never "assimilates" to the point that native linguistic and cultural intuitions are fully acquired (Geertz 1976). Our well-known difficulties in achieving a healthy degree of separation between ethnographic *description* and ethnological *explanation* make isolation and control of observer biases in the putative "descriptive" phase still more difficult.

I shall exemplify here a method of description and preliminary analysis designed to reduce the epistemological uncertainty that haunts ethnographic descriptions, particularly those of cultures studied by a single ethnographer. The method, which I call ethnolexicographic technique, comprises a strategy to eliminate biases before they have a chance to operate, through reliance upon an unusually open-ended process of data elicitation. By itself, this strategy is scarcely a

Special epistemological problems arise when exotic systems of ideas and affects are studied by a foreigner. Difficulties in knowing "the native view" are discussed, and a partial solution for this epistemological problem is proposed. Exemplification through substantive semantic analysis of a key morality term used by Montenegrin tribesmen results in a descriptive portrait of the moral self. In contrast to certain trends in ethnographic semantics, which are antiseptically formal, overstructured, unduly self-contained, or static, emphasis here is placed upon open-ended semantic inquiry and fuller articulation with the general ethnographic context by taking native decisions and social processes into direct account. [methodology/theory, morality, psychological anthropology, linguistic anthropology, Circum-Mediterranean]

radical innovation in cross-cultural methodology (see Cantril 1956), but it contrasts sharply with those used in psychological laboratory techniques (Rosenthal 1966), and with dominant trends in ethnoscience or ethnosemantics. The data for this study consist of indigenous semantic explanations of key concepts, elicited in the form of *natural definitions*, and used to enhance inquiry into the nature of the moral self.

Ever since Mead (1934) effectively defined the social self, this domain has presented anthropologists with a descriptive and theoretical challenge which maximally strains our scientific apparatus. The exotic social self has received significant attention (e.g., Hallowell 1955; Geertz 1976; Kapferer 1979), but in this important area our understanding requires further development. To this end, I shall display the descriptive meaning of the term *kajanje* in Serbocroatian, as it is defined by residents of the mountain *pleme* (tribe) of *Gornja Morača* (Upper Morača) in the Montenegrin tribal district of Southeastern Yugoslavia.

Kajanje is a private psychological reaction experienced with the realization one has done something wrong. It would be tempting to gloss *kajanje* as "regret," "guilt," or "shame," depending upon the particular context, and simply proceed with cultural analysis on that basis. However, I shall suggest that this concept, if described in isolation from the biases of a cultural outsider, is significantly different from any one concept of our own, and that the dimensions of similarity and difference could not be accurately identified through normal ethnographic field-work techniques.

the native view as a problem in descriptive epistemology

The native view is crucial for anthropological explanation, since human objects of scientific study themselves possess feelings, insights, and theories which significantly determine their own decisions and actions (Boehm 1978). The native viewpoint affects the behavior we try to explain, although obviously it does not wholly determine it. For this reason, cultural anthropologists seriously sacrifice the power of their explanations when they avoid the difficult problem of describing and understanding commonsense views which guide native decisions. The fact that these views usually are highly "intuitive" and must be discovered, described, and analyzed through the filter of the ethnographer's similar-yet-exotic views, leaves us with a most serious problem in descriptive epistemology.

Geertz (1976) quite properly warns that being a "participant" and having empathy for the natives is no guarantee that one will assimilate to the native view. Thus, as avowed scientists, ethnographers place themselves in a truly difficult position. They attempt, as cultural outsiders, to explain indigenous cultures, in which they can never participate fully, to other cultural outsiders who have never been there at all. Ethnographic standards of accuracy and replicability for describing and portraying the inner realities of native life continue to be rudimentary, in spite of the efforts of ethnoscientists and other psychological anthropologists who study cognition or decisions.

As an epistemological breakthrough, Sapir's (1933) brilliant *ex post facto* validation of his own phonological mode of descriptive analysis, in terms of indigenous "psychological reality," remains an admired achievement. He presents a tantalizing challenge to ethnographers who seek to do replicable descriptive and explanatory justice to indigenous ways of thinking. While Sapir's notion of "validating" the units used in descriptive analyses in phonemics has been experimented with for systems of meaning as well, the significant progress made so far (Wallace and Atkins 1960; Romney and D'Andrade 1964; and particularly Wallace 1969 and Wallace and Atkins 1969) has not been integrated into ethnographic field techniques.

Faced with the unique task of obtaining replicable data which do descriptive justice to culturally exotic psychological realities, anthropologists respond in several ways. One is to fall into a state of descriptive complacency by trying to keep an open mind, cross-checking statements of informants, trusting one's "seat of the pants" feeling for the culture. Another is to "scientifically" beef up the quantitative or formalistic side of data analysis after the data are acquired, or even to shape the data formalistically in the very process of elicitation. But we all know wide disparities may occur when two or more anthropologists "describe" the same culture. And, if independent ethnographic descriptions do agree, they may well do so not because descriptions of the native view are *accurate*,¹ but because two ethnographers happen to share the same operating biases.

Donald T. Campbell identifies the dependency of all science, but particularly cultural science, on commonsense knowing as the context for asking and answering scientific questions. Speaking from a methodological tradition in which psychologists' biases have been systematically ferreted out in the experimental laboratory, Campbell (1964:331-333) points out the extreme methodological problems inherent in the "one shot" case studies that many anthropologists practice, and suggests independent restudies by ethnographers of different cultural backgrounds as a way of "triangulating" through several contrasting sets of ethnographer biases.

The method I propose has more limited objectives, and requires far less effort. The domain selected for study will put the proposed methodological innovations to a severe test, in that when the subject is morality, possibilities for ethnocentric, personal, and theoretical biases of the ethnographer to distort indigenous "psychological realities" are maximal. I first build an explanation of *kajanje* in several steps, beginning with descriptive data summarized from raw native definition texts obtained from a sample of informants which, by anthropological standards, is very large. Next, the content is analyzed in a preliminary way through the use of the same semantic building blocks used by the natives. Finally, *kajanje* is explained as a component in the indigenous moral system, bringing in outside categories and models to elaborate upon the native view. This descriptive and explanatory analysis provides an intimate, yet relatively "objective," glimpse of the Montenegrin psyche after a moral malfeasance has been enacted, as well as a test of ethnolexicography as a method.

the natural definition as basis for ethnolexicography

The "folk definition" was suggested as a potentially important object of study by Weinreich (1967), although native definition texts were employed quietly by Malinowski (1935) in his role as semantic innovator. Casagrande and Hale (1967) discussed the formal attributes of a large corpus of Papago folk definitions, and Werner (1965, 1967; Werner and Begishe 1970) has worked extensively in developing this medium, both in the building of medical dictionaries and in discovering taxonomies for Navajo concepts. Here, I shall refer to spontaneous native definition texts not as "folk definitions," but as "natural definitions," because the latter term is consonant with the long standard usage of "natural language" to refer to spontaneous linguistic behavior.²

Natural definitions probably are used spontaneously in every nonliterate culture. It should be possible for ethnographers everywhere to obtain definition texts simply by stimulating otherwise untutored informants with cue words, asking for their meaning in an entirely open-ended way. This provides a universal method for obtaining information about how natives define their own concepts, one which, of course, has been used extensively but informally by ethnographers since the beginning of ethnography. Based on the open-ended elicitation of brief natural definitions from naive native informants, *ethnolexicography*³ employs a sample large enough so that reliable central tendencies may be discerned in the content of responses for a given cue word.

ethnolexicography and psychological reality

Sapir (1933) validated his dimensions of analysis for phonemic systems by taking clues from native linguistic behavior to build an inferential case that the natives were operating, unconsciously, in terms of precisely the same analytical units he had created. In carrying this concept from meaningless phonemes to semantics, Goodenough (1956) and Wallace and Atkins (1960) have suggested in the narrow context of componential analysis of kinship terms that psychologically real descriptions also may be arrived at there. Such descriptions must not be merely *structurally real*, in that they predict native labeling behavior fairly well, but *psychologically real*, in that they actually approximate the ways in which natives *think* (Wallace and Atkins 1960).

A serious practical problem in data acquisition is that an informant may generate a non-psychologically real response out of a leading question asked by the ethnographer (Wallace and Atkins 1969:412). We are all subject to the dangerous illusion that, when native consultants agree with us, the dimensions we ask them about are not merely acceptable to them, but are in fact the ones they share and use among themselves. Maintaining this illusion may bolster our emotional health in the field. But this poses a most serious problem for identifying dimensions of analysis which are psychologically real for natives: the ethnographer may easily feel these have been accurately described when in fact they have not. Normally there is no control, although a completely independent restudy may reveal certain discrepancies, or a colleague may aggressively question the validity of an ethnographic description (e.g., Barth 1974).

Obviously, obtaining descriptive accuracy in ethnography is no simple matter. One cannot merely collect and publish verbatim native texts as a necessarily "accurate" descriptive basis for explanation. It is necessary to analyze such texts in terms of those categories or dimensions which actually have meaning (or "psychological reality") for the natives themselves, as a preliminary step in description and explanation. Nor can one collect data through an elicitation procedure which guides the data in the direction of, let us say, a taxonomic arrangement. This procedure may be replicable, but it contains some dangerous assumptions concerning the shape, uniformity, and completeness of native thinking (Perchonock and Werner 1969; Boehm 1972). In this paper, I shall extend Sapir's original "phonemic" insight, and Wallace and Atkins' (1969) very useful semantic reinterpretation of it, to a different cultural domain.

how ethnolexicographic technique works

The methodological aim of this paper is to provide a technique for acquiring data which (1) reflect the native view; (2) are relatively little affected by biases of ethnographers; yet (3) are readily exploited for analytical purposes. Ethnolexicographic technique (Boehm 1972) fulfills these criteria, and is comprised of several methodological steps. First, there is a discovery and creation of a *cue word corpus*. Then comes elicitation of basic data in the form of *natural* definitions, obtained as responses to open-ended queries through the presentation of cue words (or phrases) to a suitable sample of native informants. Next, there is a relatively replicable process through which responses of multiple informants for a single cue word may be synthesized descriptively in terms of *minimal units of definition* which, like Sapir's phonemes, are psychologically real analytical units. The result is that for each cue word some basic semantic central tendencies may be discerned quantitatively, in terms of indigenous dimensions of meaning, and without bringing in any external categories to organize the data. This unusually accurate and replicable preliminary descriptive analysis lends itself effectively to normal anthropological interpretation, where various external analytical dimensions may come into play properly.

In 1965, in developing pilot variants of this technique after more than two years in the field, I decided to elicit many short definitions for each word. For the abstract terms I was most interested in, I did not trust extended definition texts obtained from only a few informants, because as a definition continued the context soon became extremely complicated, and this made for serious difficulties in comparing definitions to establish central tendencies. In using many short definitions, I discovered a trustworthy basis for content analysis, since the limited contexts were simple enough so any two informants' definitions could be reliably equated or designated as different. Ultimately, approximately 35 usable definition responses were obtained for each lexical item, using a standard list of 256 cue words and phrases, a majority of which had to do with morality. I recorded two-thirds of the total corpus of over ten thousand natural definitions; the remainder were recorded by a trained, indigenous field assistant, all in the course of one month in early 1966 (Boehm 1972).⁴

The following definition is typical in complexity, style, and length:

Cue Word: BAD MAN

LOŠ ČOVJEK

A bad man when he does some deed, steals,
steals something from someone, and afterwards
everyone hates him, and by God some do not
allow him even to come into their house, and
that is a bad man.

Loš je čovjek, kad nešto učini, ukrade, ukrade
nekome nešto, i potlje njega svi mrze, i ne
dadu mu Boga mi potlje neki ni da udje u kuću,
i to je loš čovjek.

Above, each of the five minimal units of definition has been underlined separately. I originally determined what a minimal unit was by studying the most parsimonious definitions made by informants, in which only a single concept was used to explain the cue words (Boehm 1972:116-120). But normally, there are four or five such units in each definition. In cross validating codification of such data, a native consultant made "cuts" which basically agreed with my own.⁵ Because the semantic atoms I isolated within the definitions coincided so closely with those of a minimally "prepared" native consultant, I make the tentative claim that these units of semantic structure have important psychological reality as normally unconscious building blocks employed by Montenegrins in defining their words.

advantages and disadvantages of natural definitions

In advance of putting ethnolexicographic technique to the test, some special features of natural definitions must be specified. First, when natural definitions are elicited from informants who have never worked with ethnographers, responses are relatively free of ethnographer biases beyond selection of the cue words. In using their own concepts to explain their own lexical items, informants provided my field assistant (a member of the tribe) with exactly the same kinds of definitions as I elicited, insofar as no difference in style or basic content could be discerned by either of us.

A major disadvantage that keeps social scientists from contending with large numbers of open-ended responses is difficulty in reliably coding such responses, due to their inevitable variety in both literal content and implicit context. In the case of natural definition texts, encapsulation of responses results in a relatively limited and simple context which remains fairly uniform from informant to informant, and many minimal units of definition are shared, verbatim, or are closely paraphrased. While the definitions of any two informants for the same cue word may be totally dissimilar in terms of the minimal units they generate to build a definition, a

growing consensus emerges as the sample of informants is increased, until a central tendency in the distribution of minimal units becomes clear. With an adequate sample, the natural definition format provides open-ended data which are readily analyzed quantitatively for content, in terms of central semantic tendencies.

In discussing problems related to getting native informants to explain their own concepts to us, Geertz (1976:224) states that their abilities in this domain emerge "only fleetingly and upon occasion." Uttering a natural definition is just the *occasion* which permits natives an optimal chance to explain their concepts in their own terms, since the mode of explication is a natural one. And if one places the easier-to-define words at the beginning of the cue word list, then when the difficult terms are cued, the informant at least is "in gear" and more likely to have something to say. Many concepts, while fully "intuited" by informants, normally require no reflection or explication. Therefore it is easy to draw a blank when one suddenly asks for a definition in the course of a normal ethnographic interview. However, even though a definition-eliciting situation enables ordinary informants to verbalize some of their semantic intuitions regularly, the other disadvantage mentioned by Geertz still obtains. Responses may still be *fleeting*, in the sense that many pertinent aspects of the word's meaning will be mentioned very infrequently by informants, or may even be omitted from most or all definitions. This problem is mitigated by the sheer number of responses, since some of the more elusive minimal units of meaning eventually are mentioned by someone.

In examining a corpus of natural definitions for a single cue word, minimal ideas that are statistically salient may be taken to be semantically salient as well. But low frequency minimal ideas are not necessarily of marginal importance. They may be "marginal" solely in terms of performing the stressful and highly focused act of generating a natural definition. There is the further possibility that all informants will *wholly* omit from a definition important concepts which might have been included were it not for embarrassment, fear, difficulty in conscious conceptualization and explication, or even extreme *obviousness*. One may ask a native consultant to help identify the first two; the ethnographer, however, must either bank on ethnographic intuitions in dealing with the third and fourth, or do supplementary, more directive interviewing.

If the ethnographer knows the culture fairly well, it will be possible to intuitively adjust the weightings of semantic salience for low frequency minimal units of definition which seem more important than their frequencies would indicate. In making such adjustments, investigator biases are controlled to some extent by striving to keep such interpretations consistent with information that already is unambiguously prominent in the definition texts.⁶

manipulating the shape of natural definitions

With respect to establishing relative saliency of units mentioned by informants, Davitz (1969) copes with the problem that informants are "capricious" in what they insert into brief open-ended definitions by developing a second stage of data collection. From the initial corpus of natural definitions, he codes out a number of constituent thoughts (these tend to be larger than the minimal ideas I identified with the help of native speakers) and constructs a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the new group of informants is asked to check all of the thoughts which are appropriate for the definition of the cue word in question.⁷ I prefer to cope with problems produced by entirely open-ended data; presenting informants with a multiple choice questionnaire not only has the potential effect of "leading" them, but also atomizes the responses.

There are other ways of manipulating natural definitions. For abstract cue words, it is particularly useful if informants making definitions relate their statements about symbolic content of words not only to other abstract terms, but to *concrete behavior*, since this is precisely

what the ethnographer will be trying to do in explanation. While the ethnographer is not bound by connections that natives make, knowing the nature of these connections is highly useful for shaping the ultimate, published explanation.

Ethnolexicographic technique may be modified to elicit specification of concrete behaviors through exemplification without seriously impairing the pristine, open-ended quality of the description. Montenegrin informants, in naturally encapsulating their definitions in a very focused way, tended to provide concrete exemplification for abstract cue words only sporadically. But to enrich definitions for certain cue words, informants who failed to “exemplify” spontaneously were asked through an open-ended query⁸ to supply an “example” to enhance later analysis by the ethnographer. This kind of open-ended prompting was done for the cue word *kajanje*, on the assumption that no undesirable distortion in form or content of definitions would result.

moral affects as subject of large sample lexicographic study

Even with our own culture, we have rather scant and imprecise means of verbally describing affects — above all, complicated moral affects.⁹ The problem of precisely measuring intersubjective variability in the *experiencing* of affects appears to be insuperable.¹⁰ As a foreigner and would-be participant in another culture, the very last thing an anthropologist is likely to come to know at first hand is what it *feels* like to be a native, to be embedded in the indigenous moral system. Natives sometimes are able to verbalize their feelings, especially with respect to emotional responses which are so culturally salient as to be given names in the native lexicon. But even a competent, abstract, verbal definition still leaves the ethnographer largely in the dark as to precisely how an emotion *feels*. When natives also specify behaviors which typically accompany the feeling, this at least makes it possible to describe objectively the range of situational contexts (Malinowski 1935) in which an emotion occurs. The question remains as to how contexts are to be elicited.

“Survey” techniques are not normally used in investigating the meanings of native terms, due largely, I suspect, to time and energy constraints. But also, in normal interviewing, once several informants have given similar responses, we assume it is highly likely that the ethnographer has tapped something consensual — culture. Particularly in the case of complex abstract concepts indigenously subject to a good deal of individual interpretation (Radin 1957), or related to highly subjective areas such as the Eskimo emotions studied by Briggs (1970), it is suggested that reliance upon natural definitions, combined with a much larger sample of informants, will bring substantial advantages in getting at both central tendencies and subordinate patterns.

One advantage of the large sample used in ethnolexicography, then, is that sample size acts as a control over the individual differences in emphasis which prevail in constructing highly focalized natural definitions. In my own experience, different individuals’ definitions were almost never *contradictory*. But, for most cue words, many informant responses were needed for central tendencies to emerge as a reliable measure of consensus. Another major advantage in employing a large sample of pristine informants is that this eliminates the development of unrecognized interactive biases and manipulations which grow out of normal intensive work of an ethnographer with just a few informants. This is particularly important if the area of investigation is so abstract, intuitive, or subjective, that the ethnographer as cultural participant can acquire very little direct experience with it.

ethnographic background: morality in Montenegro

The Montenegrins live in a still somewhat tribal¹¹ enclave in southern Yugoslavia, where they pursued a refuge area life as segmentary tribal warriors for many centuries, up through the late

1800s. The traditional, fully tribal Montenegrins had strongly developed patrilineal clan segments, large tribal territorial units, and an active and upwardly mobile attitude toward acquisition of heroic prestige. This came through raiding for Turkish livestock and heads, frequent major warfare with Moslem lords who all but surrounded Eastern Orthodox Christian Montenegro, and through blood feuding for honor, a pattern endemic until formation of an indigenous state in the 1850s. Some of this continued until 1916, under the aegis of a tribal kingdom.

Today, a few Montenegrins living in highly isolated tribes continue a subsistence way of life, although elementary education is now universal and many of their children move out into the modern socialist society to complete their education and pursue professional and other careers. With only a few exceptions, my 40 informants expected to remain in the tribe for their entire lives. The majority had completed four years of elementary school, although most of the older women were illiterate, and a few younger people had completed up to the eighth grade.

The moral¹² system of the Montenegrins still centers on the concept of *obraz*, literally "cheek," which is very similar to "honor" terms all around the Mediterranean. In Montenegro, *obraz* refers specifically to the cheek as a locus of physiological effects (i.e., reddening) which occur when one suffers profound social discomfort. The accompanying feeling is called *stid* or *sramota*, synonyms which may be glossed as "shame." These concepts and mechanisms persist strongly today, in the absence of warrior life. Formal religion, with confession, communion, and reward or punishment after this life, appears to have been rather weakly operative as a moral sanctioning system, even in the traditional, presocialist period. However, the presences of God and St. Elija were felt strongly as potent sources of retribution in this life for certain kinds of sinning, particularly where their direct interests were not respected, as when one worked on God's day of rest.

Blood feud had an important traditional role as a latent sanction on homicide, theft, breaking of contracts, and sexual malfeasance. The vendetta system was regulated by "Courts of Good Men" which created an elaborate oral legal code and functioned noncoercively, both to pacify feuds and to manage conflicts before they became feuds (Boehm in press). In addition, an entire tribe could coercively sanction certain kinds of behavior, such as cowardice or treason.

In the contemporary isolated tribe which I studied, the modern legal system of socialist Yugoslavia had taken over all of these latter functions, and blood feud has been kept to an absolute minimum since 1852. But the traditional informal sanctions (gossip, ridicule, direct moral confrontation, avoidance, ostracism, and exile) still functioned strongly in isolated tribes such as Upper Morača.¹³ These informal sanctions focused squarely upon the issue of a person's moral reputation, and *obraz* was the central concept. When one's *obraz* was "white," one felt able to mix freely in company; but when it was "black," one felt constrained and unable to meet other people's eyes. As a result of a black *obraz*, one felt *sramota*, and was socially miserable.¹⁴ Montenegrin morality, like all moralities, has highly systemic properties. These will be described later.

basic description of *kajanje*

Kajanje was provided by native consultants when the author, in compiling a large corpus of cue terms, asked for a word or phrase meaning "how one feels after one has done something undesirable" (*kako se čovjek osjeća, kad on je radio nešto što ne valja*).¹⁵ What I had in mind, of course, came from my own semantic template: something similar to regret, remorse, or guilt, to contrast with *sramota* (shame) and *stid* (shame/bashfulness), words I already knew to be highly salient in Montenegrin moral life. *Kajanje*, the only widely known lexical item I could discover in Upper Morača Tribe to cover internal psychological responses to one's own malfeasance, was included in the cue word corpus and was defined adequately by 35 out of 40 informants.

In presenting this basic description, considerations of space prevent listing all 35 definitions of *kajanje* with each definition broken down into its minimal units.¹⁶ Rather, I summarize the minimal units, then present a goodly share of the closely translated definitions anecdotally, as they fit into the preliminary data analysis.

untangling polysemy

In employing natural definitions to build a semantic description useful for cultural analysis, the first problem to be dealt with is polysemy. Native informants did not at any time explicitly or structurally partition definitions for *kajanje* into different senses, as they did in responding to many cue words. However, through stylistic and content analysis it was easy to divide the thirty-five definitions for *kajanje* into those which related to either a moral or a nonmoral context.

In terms of content alone, my ethnographic intuitions told me that this distinction was being made implicitly, in that all but three of the definitions seemed decisively either moral or nonmoral. Stylistic analysis validated these intuitions; on the one hand, almost every moral definition began with a stereotyped set of abstract statements and terminated without concrete exemplification. On the other hand, nonmoral definitions usually began with concrete exemplification and lacked the abstract statements. In drawing this distinction, I am referring only to the original responses. In the case of most moral definitions, informants were afterwards prompted to provide concrete examples, while for nonmoral definitions this was unnecessary since the examples were given spontaneously.

nonmoral *kajanje*

The nonmoral side of *kajanje* may be represented by the following typical definition, a response to the interviewer saying “*kajanje*?” with the understanding that the informant was to explain the term.

Definition 1 “Eh, one feels *kajanje* about something, in various ways, either in buying and selling at the market, or in marrying a daughter or a son, and — you have it in all those things.”

Space does not permit further exemplification for the nonmoral definitions. However, Table 1 specifies or paraphrases the minimal units which were used to indicate actions which triggered *kajanje*.

Table 1. Contexts in the nonmoral domain.

Cause of <i>kajanje</i>	Number of informants mentioning
Marrying badly	4
Going somewhere or failing to do so	3
Making commercial mistake	2
Giving away your cigarettes	2
Not being on time	1
Dropping out of school	1
Not settling out of court	1
Having one's hopes dashed	1
	—
Total usable definitions (content unambiguously nonmoral)	12

These nonmoral definitions produced a fair amount of consensus, in spite of their small number. Four informants mentioned disadvantageous marriage, which in the Montenegrin view is strongly linked to economic values. Making or failing to make a journey, and acting directly against one's own commercial advantage, also figured importantly. This nonmoral facet of the cue word invariably deals with regret felt over damage to one's personal self-interest. It need concern us no further at present.

examples of moral definitions

The two definitions which follow will familiarize the reader with the moral type of response to the same cue word.

Definition 2 "Kajanje means when you do some deed which is undesirable, then afterwards you would rather you hadn't done it, but that may not be erased in any way." *For example?* "For example, one did it and afterwards there's not . . . and afterwards one must feel *kajanje* for the rest of one's life." *For example, to do what?* "For example to have killed, to have stolen, or informed on someone. Those examples. And that may not be washed away afterwards at all."

Another example of the moral sense of *kajanje* being defined comes through the words of an old man:

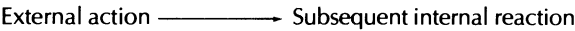
Definition 3 "Eh, *kajanje*. I'll tell you about *kajanje*. If I do something bad then afterwards I feel *kajanje* but nothing is any better for it." *How would you feel afterwards?*¹⁷ "It's all the same, whether you feel *kajanje* or not." *Is it?* "Yes, by God." *But what kind of deed . . . ?* "For example, 'When one dies, there is no *kajanje* afterwards' [Folk aphorism]. Rather, one is no more; one has died." *But what would a person do that he must feel kajanje afterwards? What deed?* "Eh, he'd do a deed for example, God forbid somehow I quarrel with you. . . ." *I see. . . .* "Then I pull out a pistol and kill you. Afterwards, I feel *kajanje*: the law must come for me and some of 'yours' must kill me." *I see.* "And that's it, I feel *kajanje*." *But why should you and I have such occasion to . . . ?* "Eh, well something heats up the blood." *Really?* "By God, yes."

In this early pilot interview, I was feeling my way with respect to asking for concrete exemplification. When old Savo Todorović finally realized what I was after, he responded fully and, characteristically of Montenegrins, was not at all shy in specifying a hypothetical conflict between us.

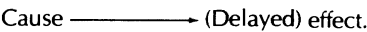
In the moral definitions, the initial abstract minimal unit almost uniformly comprised a set sequence of four substitution slots, in which close synonyms appeared in the same order:

- Slot 1 to do (I, you, someone)
- Slot 2 "something" (undesirable)
- Slot 3 then later
- Slot 4 *kajanje*

Stripped bare, the essential informant strategy to explain this cue word is:



or,



In Table 2, one can also see the frequencies for other minimal units which informants used spontaneously to elaborate this basic initial minimal unit.

Putting all of this information together, *kajanje* obviously is retrospective; it is a delayed reaction having prominent *affective* elements, and also *cognitive* elements, since there is evaluation of information concerning past action. Futility is apparent, but so is volition. The resulting frustration reaction is obviously disturbing. Usually, *specific* antisocial behaviors are mentioned only

Table 2. Frequencies for minimal units of definition concerned with *kajanje* in the abstract.

Minimal unit of definition	Number of informants mentioning		
	Moral definitions	Nonmoral definitions	Mixed definitions
One does a bad deed one ought not to	15	3	2
<i>Kajanje</i> comes afterwards	16	3	2
One wishes one hadn't	5	2	—
<i>Kajanje</i> doesn't help anything	6	—	1
One feels badly about it	4	—	1
Total usable abstract definitions	16	4	2

after prompting. These concretize the abstract phrase “something undesirable,” which composes the second substitution slot in the initial abstract minimal unit of definition.

For definitions concerned with the moral “sense” of *kajanje*, certain undesirable actions are highly favored by informants (see Table 3). Fighting, quarreling, and cursing people may all be seen as parts of a single Montenegrin conflict pattern which has killing as its possible culmination. Lying and deception, though represented by different lexical items, are very close to each other in the Montenegrin mind, while theft stands somewhat apart. These three patterns account for all examples mentioned by more than one informant, and jibe with lists of most prevalently mentioned undesirable actions derived from other cue words in the moral domain (Boehm 1972). Every deed involves a hostile action against another person, mostly direct and sometimes violent, sometimes physical and sometimes verbal, but sometimes indirect or even unknown to the victim. These *outwardly aggressive* deeds contrast sharply with the exclusively *self-destructive* actions in the nonmoral domain which appeared in Table 2.

Table 3. Contexts in the moral domain.

Cause of <i>kajanje</i>	Number of informants mentioning
Killing	8
Stealing	7
Lying	3
Fighting	3
Quarreling	3
Deceiving	2
Miscellaneous single mentions	7
Total usable definitions (content unambiguously moral)	21

This concludes the basic descriptive summary. In the interest of brevity, I have not attempted to segregate presentation of raw data from the beginnings of data analysis.¹⁸ After the next section, there will be some basis for independent assessment of my descriptive interpretations in that many entire moral definitions are presented there in translation.

completing the ethnographic description

A relatively “mechanical” discovery procedure has been employed to build a preliminary description of the basic meaning of *kajanje* in terms of the definition making strategies of Montenegrin informants. Here, the mode of data analysis moves toward the more heavily

intuitive processes through which ethnographers normally construct ethnographies. However, in the methodological spirit espoused in this paper, I shall anchor the analysis to the content of the natural definition responses. I shall focus on minimal units mentioned by two or more informants, present them in the context of the complete definitions in which they appeared, and give them some further interpretation. Other dimensions I felt were interesting will receive attention, as well, as the preliminary description begins to blend more definitively with interpretation.

actor's internal state when the transgression is committed

It may be inferred that *kajanje* does not take place while the misdeed is being commissioned. The actor may be too caught up emotionally in the enactment of the deed to take stock morally at that time. In Definition 3, the blood's heating up was mentioned as a reason one might kill someone impulsively, while in Definition 10 (to appear shortly) the informant says that after killing someone a man knows he would not have done it after "cooling off." In both definitions the "heat of the moment" is at issue.

Rather than a crime of passion, however, it sometimes appears the informant has in mind more of a failure in judgment resulting in a lack of *self-control*.

Definition 4 "Kajanje? You have done something unworthy, and afterward you would like not to have done it, but you can't take it back. 'Why did you do something which is not worthy?' [you ask yourself]." For example what might that be? "Either you have killed a man, or you have stolen, or you have lied, or you have betrayed some government agency or . . . or some . . . government . . . There you are! You have been dishonest, you wanted to get somewhere, you couldn't, you wanted to go here or there, you made a mistake, and then you feel *kajanje*, because you did that, and you could have refrained from doing it, that unworthy deed which is not sanctioned by the rest of society."

Definition 5 provides still a different clue to the internal state of the actor while the misdeed is being committed. Here, it is not an error of passion, and not so much an error of judgment, as an inability to predict: "*Kajanje*: I do a deed — I steal, kill a man¹⁹ — then I feel *kajanje*. I would not have done it had I been able to foresee things, and that is why I feel *kajanje*." Thus, malfeasance may result from (1) an emotional impulse which overwhelms other mental processes; (2) a faulty judgment; (3) inability to make an accurate prediction; or from a combination of these problems.

intensity and duration

Obviously, the *intensity* of *kajanje* as a delayed reaction depends upon the nature of the deed and the individual. Only a few informants specified anything in this respect. In Definition 2, killing may not be "erased" in any way afterwards. Another informant expresses the intensity of the feeling even more eloquently.

Definition 6 "To feel *kajanje* by my understanding means this. I have done something which is not good, and after I feel that I did not need to do that, then I feel *kajanje*, then I feel *kajanje* but it does not help afterwards. But I am constantly sick in my psyche because I have done that. There you are, that is to feel *kajanje*!" For example, what would you do? "For example, I stole something from you, I shouldn't have stolen that from you, I take it and so on, but I did that, and I feel *kajanje* all my life for having done it. I killed your husband and brother or something like that, and feel *kajanje* always."

From these two responses, the level and duration of *kajanje* are high when major transgressions such as killing and thievery are at issue. Because Montenegrins are such an intensely moral people, I assume the power, pain and ineradicability of *kajanje* are potentially very strong for most or all individuals, if major malfeasance is at issue. I believe this was mentioned infrequently because it was so obvious.

dialogue of self with self: self-reproach and blame

A notable feature of the *kajanje* reaction is the unambiguous and dramatic emergence of one aspect of what Mead (1934) calls the “self.” In some cases, informants actually share the details of a kind of internal dialogue which takes place, as it were, between two parts of one and the same person. One is a hypothetical native actor, as the person who in the past has gone ahead and done something to damage his or her own self-interest. The other is that same actor looking back evaluatively at the action, with a self-reproachful perspective:

Definition 7 “When one does something which is not worthy, and afterwards one feels *kajanje*.” For example, how is that? “When one steals and then afterwards feels *kajanje* and says: ‘I didn’t need to do that and it wasn’t worthy.’”

Definition 8 “You do something which is not desirable, then afterwards you feel *kajanje*. You say: ‘That wasn’t necessary, what you did!’ Isn’t that so?” For example, what would a person do, to feel *kajanje* afterwards? “Eh, by God, he’d do something undesirable, to feel *kajanje*.” What would he do? “To feel *kajanje*, would he do what? He’d do this: take for example whatever you will, to drive away his wife then feel *kajanje*, to anger his mother, then feel *kajanje*, to anger his sister then feel *kajanje* . . .” Oh . . . “Eh, all of which is undesirable, to do this and after to feel *kajanje*. Or to do the same to a neighbor or to anyone at all, then after to feel *kajanje*. That’s it.”

Self-querying may be seen in Definition 4, Definition 11 (to be excerpted shortly), and in three of the nonmoral definitions. Some self-reproachful definitions carry an unmistakable flavor of strongly *blaming* oneself, including Definitions 8 and 11, and in Definition 9 (below), where psychic bifurcation is not made explicit but self-blame is strongly implied:

Definition 9 “*Kajanje* is, if a man has done some deed, then afterwards he is sorry (*žao*) that he has done some evil to someone. That is *kajanje*. It means that later, he would not have done it to him — that means that he has felt *kajanje*. It means he was in the wrong for doing it.”²⁰

volition versus futility

While internal psychic bifurcation sometimes expresses self-blame, it may also simply express volition, a desire to undo the deed. The following definition, in which the “heat of the moment” results in a major malfeasance, expresses this well:

Definition 10 “Eh, he did some deed then feels *kajanje*. I do something and then afterwards I feel *kajanje*. ‘By God, I have felt *kajanje* now!’ one says (to oneself).” What would a person do, to feel *kajanje*? “What would he do?” Yes. “Eh, plenty of things . . . kills someone and afterwards he feels *kajanje* and because of that says that he has felt *kajanje* because of what he has done.” And how does he think, when he feels *kajanje* like that?²¹ “He feels *kajanje*, he would not have done that deed later when he had cooled off. So he feels *kajanje* and afterwards would not have done that deed, afterwards — if he could change it — but he did do it, so. . . .”

This expresses volition directed at undoing an action already completed. In all, there were five moral definitions in which such volition was expressed.

Somewhat paradoxically, there is a simultaneous and acute realization that experiencing this retrospective volition is quite useless. To illustrate this futile dimension, I shall excerpt definitions already given, and excerpt the expression of volition as well, where it co-occurs with futility, to underscore the fact that these opposing orientations regularly coexist within the same definition.

Definition 6 “. . . I have done something which is not good, and afterwards I feel that I did not need to do that . . . but it does not help me, afterwards. I am constantly sick in my psyche because I have done that. . . .” (steal, kill)

Definition 11 “. . . tomorrow I have said: ‘I needn’t have done that,’ and I wish tomorrow I hadn’t done it, but that doesn’t help then” (quarrel and fight, with punishment anticipated)

Definition 2 “. . . then afterwards you would rather you hadn’t done it, but that may not be erased in any way . . . that may not be erased later at all.” (kill, steal, lie, betray)

Definition 10 "... he ... would not have done the deed afterwards if he could change it — but he did it, so ... " (kill)

Definition 3 "... then afterwards, I feel *kajanje* but nothing is any better for it ... 'When one dies, there is no *kajanje* afterwards.' " (kill)

Definition 4 "... afterwards you would like not to have done it, but you can't take it back ... " (kill, steal, lie, betray)

Definition 12 "... then later you feel *kajanje*, but it does not help you. '*Kajanje* is a lost place.' " (kill, steal, to be a slut)

This sense of volition is characteristic of the highly active Montenegrins. But futility is also a prominent philosophical theme, since *sudbina* (fate) predetermines one's death or bad falls in which bones are broken. This combination of strong retrospective volition with an absolute feeling of futility results in intense frustration. The definitions contain no hint of potential remediability through future improvement in social behavior, ritual atonement, penitence and expiation, or other reparation for damaged moral and self-interest. So moral *kajanje* refers to life's most irreparable losses, and the emotional discomforts which follow. These were determined by the actor's past decisions or impulses, no longer subject to control.

the problem of external consequences

There exists in psychological anthropology a venerable if dubious distinction between "internal" and "external" sanctions (Piers and Singer 1971). There is evidence that *kajanje* is directly connected with *discovery* of malfeasance and anticipated practical consequences, although the most feared consequence, the loss of *obraz*, is never mentioned directly by informants in defining *kajanje*. However, language such as "ineradicable" (Definition 2), mentioning of the deed as not being sanctioned by the rest of society (Definition 4), and the reference to blood vengeance retaliation (Definition 3), implies that damage to moral self-interest lies heavily in the public domain, and tends to damage *obraz*. This is an omission of something which, to Montenegrins, is utterly obvious.

In Definition 2, the evocative reference to the lifelong and ineradicable *kajanje* reaction which follows major transgressions such as killing, stealing, or informing may well suggest to an American reader that something similar to private, internal "guilt" is intended semantically. But the definitions for *crni obraz*, "loss of face," have exactly the same flavor, involve precisely the same malfeasances, and refer to external social consequences of moral malfeasance. A purely private and undetectable misdeed still might provoke a strong *kajanje* reaction, for Montenegrins do speak often of "self-respect." Sometimes, or for certain individuals, private moral self-evaluation, alone, is surely an important moral sanction. But there is no evidence in the natural definitions to suggest this is the exclusive focus of *kajanje*, nor any term in widespread use in Upper Morača Tribe having that connotation exclusively, as "guilt" supposedly does in English. My conclusion is that self-esteem and social esteem are very closely connected in Montenegro, and are difficult to set apart.

synonyms for *kajanje*

Montenegrins have a typically Circum-Mediterranean "fatalistic" way of rationalizing some of life's more weighty events. For the more passive kind of suffering that attends reactions to a death in one's family, *žalost*, not *kajanje*, is used. *Žalost* glosses as "mourning," in which loss is combined with acceptance, but there is no hint of personal liability. There is also *žao*, which

glosses as “sorrow” in English, mainly in the sense of being apologetic but also feeling “regret” internally (verbal form: *žaliti*). The only informant to use this term synonymously with *kajanje* was a boy whose understanding of more abstract cue words was somewhat marginal, but I believe *žao* may be substituted for *kajanje* in certain contexts.

summary of preliminary description

Moral *kajanje* clearly takes place later than the malfeasance, and this reaction comprises a wholly internal process of self-appraisal. It is realized that a prior antisocial action was definitively destructive to the moral self-interest of the individual, both in terms of self-esteem and, potentially, social esteem. *Kajanje* in its moral sense can be long lasting; it involves a strong desire to reconstruct the individual’s behavior history, combined with an absolute sense of futility. This psychological combination can be intense, unpleasant, and highly frustrating.

Because social reparation emerged nowhere, *kajanje* seems to be an internal *frustration reaction* having a highly active tone, rather than a *state of contrition* which has active social or religious expiation components, or a state of frustration dominated by a sense of passive acceptance. In this, the definitions for moral *kajanje* are similar to nonmoral ones, in which immediate loss or damage to self-interest is always clearly salient. For moral *kajanje*, this tends to apply as well, but the situational context is more complex: one damages one’s own moral self-interest through damaging the self-interest of another person in a way which is socially disapproved. Thus, the moral and nonmoral senses of *kajanje* are quite close.

moral system and moral self as analytical framework

In their most basic and direct operation, moralities are systems for conditioning individual behavior through both positive and negative sanctions. Sanctions are oriented to goals set by shared moral values. As a system, these moral values deal in human behaviors, qualities, attitudes, and motives, and in many cases come with a special tone of voice indicating the best interests of a community are involved. This is consistent with Durkheim (1947) and Redfield (1953). However, such a view is unduly “mechanical.”

The moral system, taken as a whole, may be modeled better as a special guidance component of the social system, in that morality involves conscious diagnosis and correction of social problems by native actors on a rational basis (Boehm 1979). At one end of this conditioning system is the collective evaluation of both societal needs and individual behaviors. This takes place as individuals are consciously evaluated by other individuals through gossiping (Haviland 1977). This ongoing rational assessment also helps maintain those moral values perceived as useful, and sometimes can promote deliberate changes in them when a social problem arises. This conscious, purposive element may be easily discerned in active application of sanctions to individuals who transgress strongly, but it is most evident in the creation and implementation of means for managing conflicts. There, specific moral transgressions may not be at issue, but societal disruption is predictable; such disruption affects the harmony which is explicitly valued in every human society.

At the other end of this causal chain is the object of conditioning, the individual who sometimes behaves admirably and sometimes transgresses. Humans can and do anticipate fairly well the negative consequences of enacting an impulse without ever having actually emitted the behavior, and so may curb their behavior without having been directly “conditioned” in the operant sense. Such generalization, anticipation, decision making and self-control require a

cognitively complex outlook. They require also an ability to distinguish the “self” (Mead 1934) as an entity subject to outside moral judgment, and at risk socially or supernaturally. Both direct operant conditioning and such anticipatory generalization are, I believe, characteristic of the moral self-regulation of all human beings, and also of their efforts to regulate others. When Montenegrins describe *kajanje*, their natural definitions reveal a great deal about the internal, self-evaluative component in moral behavior. This I call the “moral self,” a crucial mechanism for the overall operation of any moral system.

place of *kajanje* in the moral system

Human capacity for rational²² decision making provides important contributions (1) in the creation, maintenance and modification of moral values, (2) in the application and modification of sanctioning mechanisms, and (3) in decisive interference in conflict situations. In turn, individuals respond to moral systems not solely in terms of operant conditioning, but through the usually careful (if often semiconscious or “intuitive”) rational calculation of a moral course of action. Normal Montenegrin individuals reach moral decisions by trying to maximize personal, hedonic gratification, and calculating simultaneously how to maintain their moral status at a satisfactory level, in terms of both social esteem and self-esteem. Obviously, moral *kajanje* is closely involved in this individual level of the working of the moral system.

It is clear from the definitions of *obraz* (Boehm 1972) that Montenegrins themselves think constantly and carefully about their overall social reputations, and view their maintenance as a constant, uphill struggle. In fitting the preliminary descriptive analysis to the moral system model proposed in this paper, the main point is that moral *kajanje* is a highly unpleasant reaction, and one which involves a strong element of rational self-assessment. Thus, with the troublesome and often continuing sense of frustration over one’s own moral performance, the very experiencing of *kajanje* constitutes a deterrent to repetition of the malfeasance.

One reason *kajanje* is adaptively important to the Montenegrin individual, over the long run, is that in a low population density pastoral society there exist many opportunities for undetected antisocial aggression or illicit hedonic gratification. Due to the frequently isolated situations of individuals and desirable “commodities,” it often seems easily possible to “get away with something”: to have an affair or to steal something. In any one situation, such assessments may be realistic. But a gossiping tribal community, being intensely interested in people’s moral lives, will quickly build a circumstantial case against a suspected regular transgressor, even in the absence of definitive detection. Because such evaluation is done quietly, one’s *obraz* is gradually damaged more and more, with no justifiable basis for direct sanctioning which would provide the individual with feedback. People, therefore, stand in great fear of “talk” (*priča*). But this generalized rational awareness does little good, if impulses to transgress “just one more time” are strong, and definitive detection is so very unlikely.

This means an individual may do substantial damage to his or her reputation without ever being the recipient of direct social sanctions. This is partly due to Montenegrin reluctance to make accusations which cannot be backed up with unambiguous evidence. But it is also due to a special value placed on the avoidance of doing injury to another’s *obraz*, even when he or she is clearly in the wrong, as a special “metas sanction” which controls other sanctions. A reciprocal mechanism called *držanje na aru*, “keeping up a front,” is practiced by a malefactor even when he or she suspects (or even knows) the tribal community is well aware of a pattern of misdeeds. Thus, for many types of transgression, the individual behaves socially as though nothing wrong has been done, and the moral community goes along with this. In case of something like extreme cowardice or “serious” incest, this mechanism would tend to break down quickly, due to

extreme moral indignation on the part of the community, and direct moralistic aggression would result. But, for example, with known premarital sexual activity on a female's part, or a suspected murder, or a strongly suspected theft, it usually does not. We are left with an apparent hiatus in the sanctioning system. While reluctance to apply sanctions reduces immediate socio-psychological stress for both individuals and the moral community, it also deprives an individual living in a severely critical, moral community of early warning feedback from the moral system. Over the long run, this would be potentially dangerous to the actor's *obraz*, were it not for *kajanje*.

***kajanje* as alarm system**

Kajanje is proposed as the early warning and guidance device needed for individual information processing, self-evaluation, and self-control to be effective. As such, *kajanje*'s emotional intensity serves as a counterbalance to the impulses of the normally very self-assertive Montenegrin man or woman, most of whom do not easily control antisocial predilections. *Kajanje* is far more than a mere negative sanction; as a psychological frustration reaction, it has important symbolic or cognitive functions. It enables individuals to relate sharp feelings of frustration to the specific behavior which was undesirable, and stirs up the issue of *volition* for potential future application toward achieving the conscious long-term goal of maintaining a good social status and self-respect. This has obvious implications for subsequent self-control.

In summary, one adaptive value of *kajanje* is that it prevents a person from acquiring a bad reputation in the absence of social feedback. Self-control takes place in the absence of a discovery. This is important because a serious transgression, once discovered or strongly suspected, tends to stay with one for life. For the larger moral community *kajanje* helps to reduce the necessity of direct social sanctioning. This is always stressful in a segmentary society in which moralistic aggression can easily lead to a serious conflict which will divide the society politically (Boehm in press).

implications for studying "conscience" and "self"

Kajanje is one semi-nonwestern culture's way of labeling a genre of moral self-monitoring behavior believed to be universal (Hallowell 1955:105-107). Our own most general term for this mechanism is "conscience," while "regret" or "being sorry" (in their moral senses) appear to be fairly close generalized glosses. But if one compares intuitively American and Montenegrin terms for retrospective moral self-evaluation in their *specifics*, there are obvious differences: *kajanje* is not glossed very well by our narrower Judeo-Christian notions of guilt, remorse or repentance.

Similarities noted above provide no basis for assuming such similarity exists for all cultures; some of the overlap must be laid at the doorstep of a shared culture area, and a thousand years of constant, aggressive proselytization by literate Eastern Orthodox priests in tribal Montenegro. In spite of this methodological liability, I propose the *moral self* as a universal component of the social self, because some form of experiencing retrospective moral self-evaluation exists in every culture. I also predict that important aspects of this experience will be labeled lexically everywhere.

Cross-culturally, there are few primary data to support this position with the rigor I have espoused, and little attention has been devoted to seeking them.²³ Malinowski (1964[1926]:58) generalized that the "rational appreciation of cause and effect by the natives" in moral affairs was regularly underestimated. But Malinowski did not attack the problem of describing moral

self-evaluation directly. Levy (1975:325-356) has come close, in interviews with Tahitians about how they might cope with future moral temptations. Using normal elicitation techniques aimed at discovering shame versus guilt dimensions, he obtained dialogues concerning the ways Tahitians chart their moral courses in life. In Tahiti, both self-respect and respect of the moral community figure heavily in discussions of temptation and its avoidance; but anticipation of socially painful discovery by the moral community appears to be more prominent. In searching for a word suggestive of guilt, Levy explored *arofa*, a term applied to concern or compassion for the person whom one might harm. But in Levy's excerpts of his interviews, *ex post facto* moral self-evaluation is not focused upon. Presumably, there exists in Tahitian some general term similar to "being sorry" or "regret" or *kajanje*, which might be used for ethnolexicographic elicitation, but treatment of the moral lexicon was limited in that study.

For the Navajo, Ladd's (1957) extensive interviews with a single informant reveal a style of thinking about hypothetical future moral malfeasance similar to that in Tahiti, and free of the Christian influence Tahitians experienced. Again, the elicitation technique was relatively pre-focused and directive, compared to ethnolexicography. As a result, the texts are too complicated for reliable cross-cultural comparison, as I have espoused it. The same problem holds for Levy's interviews, although by traditional anthropological standards both of these studies are exceptional, that is, relatively open-ended and highly convincing to a member of the same culture as the interviewer who set up the questions. Some described similarities between Montenegrin, American, Tahitian and Navajo styles of moral self-evaluation may be due to conscious or unconscious biases of ethnographers. But since moral self-evaluation is universal, I am confident that with a more uniform and bias-free mode of description, many of these similarities would remain. A technique such as ethnolexicography, supported by better supplementary interviewing than I have been able to accomplish, could provide a sounder comparative basis for pinpointing not only similarities but differences, where cultures studied are maximally exotic to our own so far as the moral self is concerned.

Hallowell (1955:75-81) has discussed anthropological efforts to study the social self cross-culturally, and more recently a number of anthropologists (e.g., Read 1955; Geertz 1966, 1976; Levy 1975; Straus 1977; Kapferer 1979) have applied Mead's concepts to exotic cultures, assuming they have universal explanatory utility. Kapferer (1979:110-111) perhaps speaks for all when, in his analysis of demonic possession and exorcism, he makes no claim to have identified or studied the Sri Lanka self *directly*. In studying *kajanje* with quite a different initial focus, I noticed that natural definition texts revealed the Montenegrin self rather directly, in its moral aspects. This seemed particularly relevant to Mead's general definition, since the emotional tone and language of self-confrontation and self-blame exhibited in the definitions was extremely reminiscent of the way Montenegrin parents dealt with their children in cases of moral malfeasance; this, of course, supports Mead's (1934) basic hypothesis that the self develops out of past social interactions with others.

I return now to the problem of psychological reality and the technical issue of establishing psychological validity for analysis of human mental processes. Mead's characterization of the social self was based upon Cooley (1964), but also upon his introspectively arrived-at understanding of how fellow Americans "objectified" themselves. The definitions for *kajanje* reveal the same kind of symbolic interaction Mead talks about, but at a purely internal level *within* the self. In focusing the symbolic interactionist approach upon intrapsychic events, instead of events between different individuals, one is able to see directly the "I" relating to the objectified "me," as the moral self goes into gear as an instrument of self-evaluation. This was present explicitly in a number of the definitions, and I am certain would apply to all informants in the sample. Indeed, several informants strongly implied that they believed others did this, since hypothetical verbal exchanges of "self with self" usually involved someone else, not themselves.

Of course, my informants never explicitly spelled out the existence of the self in terms similar

to Mead's, although in my judgment they possessed the conceptual and linguistic apparatus to do so. But they did expose the moral self by referring to the cue word *kajanje* in its verbal, reflexive form (*kajati se*), and more explicitly by speaking spontaneously of its operation as an internal dialogue between two parties within the same person. It was with similar kinds of clues that Sapir (1933) argued for the psychological reality of certain phonemes as structural units which the outside investigator first created himself; he later deduced that the natives acted as though they thought in terms of the same units, but did so unconsciously. My conclusion is that the concept of moral self, as I have defined it as an important component of Mead's social self, similarly has significant psychological reality for Montenegrins.

I believe my characterization of the moral self is consistent with Mead's highly processual approach. I emphasize that it is on the basis of both feeling emotions and making rational-cognitive calculations, that individuals try to "behave themselves," striving to accomplish their social purposes through the making of decisions. Thus, morality is rooted in a conflict between gratification of hedonic or destructive impulses, and the rational desire to maintain a decent social esteem and self-esteem. This argument is at odds with certain themes in sociobiological thinking (Wilson 1975, 1978), in which a kind of "selfless" altruism (supposedly genetically prepared) is focused upon as a dominant force in morality. Montenegrin natural definitions, along with the findings of Levy (1975) and Ladd (1957), support the conclusion that morally "correct" behavior is grounded heavily in rational calculation of consequences, as opposed to blind, mechanical, operant conditioning, or behavioral impulses prepared by genes.²⁴ The prerequisite for such calculation is Mead's social self, and then the moral self in particular, as a specialized component of the social self.

possibilities and problems for cross-cultural comparison

Campbell and LeVine (1970:366) point out that cross-cultural comparability of ethnographic research findings is reduced by the extreme individuality of discrete studies. In addition to the effects of idiosyncratic personalities of ethnographers, our professionally motivated compulsion to "focus on a unique hypothesis and a unique context" intensifies this problem. It is hoped that ethnolexicographic technique can produce data which are more reliably comparable, at least where the phenomena under investigation possess universal properties, and are lexically labelled in the cultures to be compared.

By use of decentered translation (Werner and Cambell 1970) into English (or some other language), as a common denominator, I believe this may be possible. For example, the preliminary analysis of *kajanje* provides a basis for close comparison with similarly acquired data from other cultures. While definitive overlap in minimal units might, in some cases, be relatively small, those overlapping patterns discerned would be more convincing in terms of psychological validity and replicability than the usual intuitive comparison of data elicited through normal interview techniques. This would serve as an anchor for further comparison at higher levels of abstraction.

A cursory examination of Davitz (1969:42) reveals considerable overlap of similar minimal units between Montenegrin *kajanje* and our own "guilt," "remorse," and "regret," along with some contrasts in content or emphasis. The one best gloss for *kajanje* would appear to be "regret." But the atomistic "questionnaire" technique of elicitation used by Davitz, referred to earlier, precludes the building of an integrated description of his cue words as they are conceived by college students in New York City. This lack of a coherent context makes definitive comparison difficult.

Campbell and LeVine (1970:2-3) state further that cross-cultural comparisons must be made by matching discrete items within "a prior, context-dependent matching of whole patterns." The

moral system and moral self provide such a broader context for comparing self-evaluative psychological reactions cross-culturally. I submit that the “moral self” context is more useful for general comparative purposes than the biased “shame” and “guilt” concepts, correctly criticized by Piers and Singer (1971). Even in our own culture, those two terms are fraught with ambiguity. The parallel contrast between “externalized” and “internalized” sanctions appears to be more straightforward and descriptive. But these dimensions, too, have been ambiguous as typological labels for moral systems because of personal and cultural biases of researchers (Piers and Singer 1971:68-70). Whatever theoretical biases are inherent in the moral system and the moral self, these more generalized concepts at least insure that the ethnographer will focus upon both the structural-functional properties of social systems, and the individual moral actor as maker of moral decisions in a *processual* framework.

In thinking about intercultural differences between *kajanje* and terms from other cultures which also describe *ex post facto* moral self-evaluation, there are three dimensions to be considered. First, there is affect, a dimension so elusive that its basic study remains far from definitive even within our own culture. Second, there is the range and distribution of situational contexts (Malinowski 1935) associated with such a term. Specific moral and immoral behaviors should be readily comparable between cultures, so long as the larger cultural contexts are taken into account. Third, there is what I call, for lack of a better term, the “style of self-evaluation.” If the human psyche is found everywhere to be bifurcated into behaving versus self-monitoring dimensions, this will help corroborate the universality of Mead’s (1934) basic insights, and also will illuminate cross-cultural continuities in the specifically moral functions of the self. In the absence of standardized data, the tentative comparisons attempted above must be considered relatively crude and subject to biases.

advantages of ethnolexicography as a basic method of elicitation

I have taken the stance of an extreme epistemological skeptic with respect to what we call “description” in anthropology. Specifically, I have questioned the confidence we place in normal techniques of ethnographic interviewing, including most of ethnoscience, to collect basic data which are not only reasonably replicable, but are as free as possible of observer bias. One objective has been to upgrade the likelihood that ethnographic analysis will take into account dimensions which are psychologically real to natives: this is a matter of *descriptive accuracy*. A second and closely related objective has been to improve the replicability of data collection for particularly “subjective” domains by removing many sources of investigator bias without actually striving to identify them. This has been done in a methodologically self-conscious manner, through reliance upon an open-ended yet naturally well focused technique of data elicitation.

As scientific data, natural definitions made by native actors have a curious status. In a way they constitute descriptive data for us to use in explanation. But they are different from our recorded observations of natural behavior, the things natives say and do in everyday life. They are also different from the verbatim oral texts ethnographers normally publish. Natural definitions, in fact, are a bit *unnatural*, in that they are special semantic (sometimes even metasemantic) statements made by natives about the meanings of their own meanings, in the style of an exegesis. As such, they may be viewed as *explanations* as well as descriptions, made by natives for our edification in the same mode as they are made for the benefit of other natives.

In proposing the *natural definition* as a probably universal data source which lends itself well to large-sample survey work in ethnography, I have exemplified *ethnolexicographic technique* as a relatively mechanical and replicable mode of progression from description to preliminary

descriptive analysis. This begins with orthodox investments in field research, followed by acquisition of a cue word corpus, elicitation of definitions, transcription, coding for minimal units, further interviewing,²⁵ and a basic, preliminary description built carefully on the distribution and interrelations of these units.

Perhaps this method does not provide a definitive *ex post facto* test for psychological validity of anthropological explanations. Nor is it an absolute discovery procedure for full, psychologically real, preliminary descriptive analyses which take into account all of the shared dimensions through which natives actually think. But natural definition data, used as descriptive anchors, make possible a more direct access to salient “psychologically real” dimensions upon which further explanations may be built. This is particularly true if the domain under study is unusually subjective, subtle, abstract, complex, or subject to investigator bias.

The technique exemplified has advantages in making ethnographic description simultaneously more public, replicable, psychologically real, and independent from ethnological explanation. Working closely with natural definitions also offers the advantage of sensitizing the ethnographer’s intuitions to the native view. This comes first through an elicitation context which is more unidirectional than usual, in that the stimuli used by the ethnographer are limited merely to cue words in the native language, and the informants have not been “trained.” Later, one is forced to cope with a relatively unmanipulated world of native semantics as one’s basic data. For the ethnographer, these processes constitute a kind of special education in the native view. As a personal testimonial, when I returned from Montenegro after well over two years in the field, I understood *kajanje* quite imperfectly, having been the captive of my own biases when I originally recorded natural definitions of this concept. Making the present analysis has improved that understanding vastly, at considerable cost to biases I had not managed to shed while in the field.

If ethnology is the science of understanding and explaining the behavior of exotic natives in a meaningful context, then taking into account their view of the natural and social worlds is a necessary part of this science. Ethnolexicography is a useful tool for bringing greater scientific rigor to this difficult enterprise. Any person whom natives consider fluent in their language can elicit virtually the same definitions, and central tendencies resulting from minimal unit analysis should be highly if not perfectly replicable. This technique may also be viewed as an epistemological tool in the personal service of the anthropologist as a “participant” committed to “knowing” the native view as intimately and well as possible. But while working with natural definitions does help to close the knowledge gap at a purely personal epistemological level, the personal and scientific levels are, in practice, inseparable in the doing of anthropology.

In applying ethnolexicography to the understanding of *kajanje*, I have sought to move back and forth, as Geertz (1976:223) suggests we must, between a descriptive immediacy in which the authentic native view is carefully taken into account, and an explanatory distance from which we build our own theories rather independently of what we know of native theories. The public progression from a “mechanical” descriptive summation of minimal units to the preliminary analysis provides an effective initial route for reaching a point where one is able to build broader explanations in terms of outside models, yet do maximum justice to the indigenous view.²⁶

If cues from what psychologists have learned about subtle investigator biases in experimental laboratories are worth taking, then perhaps the unusual preoccupation with methodology exhibited in this paper is not misapplied. The web of potential and likely unconscious biases, which attends normal ethnographic practice, is so pervasive and complicated that we cannot unravel it by ferreting out the biases as psychologists have done (Rosenthal 1966). Instead, we may have to seriously reconsider our basic methodology, at least for studying the many domains that involve native minds as the agencies of decision making (Boehm 1978:286-288).

summary

To return to Montenegro and *kajanje*, I have harnessed ethnolexicographic technique to refocus both description and interpretation for a complicated moral domain. My intention has been to reduce the play of ethnocentric and other biases, which is predictable — yet difficult to isolate — when one conducts such a study. In order to characterize moral self-evaluation in culturally specific terms, I have employed a relatively public and standardized technique to isolate description from explanation more definitively than is usual in anthropology. This preliminary characterization has served as a point of departure for further interpretation and explanation.

In attempting to describe accurately and replicably the meaning of a single lexical item, I have constructed a preliminary interpretive description of the moral self, one which has considerable psychological validity. This validity comes both at the level of minimal units isolated in the natural definitions, and in terms of the “self” as a conceptual entity Montenegrins themselves appear to deal with. This mode of descriptive analysis also has implications for the further, cross-cultural study of the social self, in terms of trying to isolate common denominators relatively free of observer bias.

The analysis has been undertaken in the spirit of questioning whether current ethnographic practices are as epistemologically reliable as we appear to believe they are. As with ethno-science, this skepticism applies to our attempts to describe accurately, understand, and explicate the ways in which natives *think*. But it applies equally to our general ethnographic commitment to account for indigenous modes of thought when we interpret and explain native *behavior*. An attempt has been made here to work at both of these levels in building an interpretation of *kajanje* which reveals relations of thought, feeling, and behavior, and is carefully anchored to descriptive data which, relatively speaking, are replicable *and* accurate.

notes

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¹ The notion of ethnographic “accuracy” has raised some interesting debate (Burling 1964) with respect to claims of ethnoscientists that their discovery procedures result in the only possible accurate description of a domain, when various different componential analyses may in fact be arrived at. There are other, more basic problems: one is that different natives think in different ways (Radin 1957:4, 53-62); another is that the same native thinks in different ways depending upon the context (Perchonock and Werner 1969); still another is that the same native may think in different ways, at different times, when the semantic context remains constant but the mode of elicitation is open-ended (Boehm 1972:233-255). Because of these basic problems, arriving at a psychologically real description of the native view by interviewing a single informant in a specific semantic context constitutes only an important beginning in the quest for greater descriptive accuracy.

² This term also lends more of an air of dignity to indigenous efforts in the field of lexicography than does the somewhat patronizing nomenclature “folk definition,” but for practical purposes the terms may be viewed as semantically isomorphic.

³ A better name for the technique would be “ethnosemantics,” since I am dealing with indigenous capacities to describe the meanings of words. However, “ethnosemantics” has already come to designate something which ethnographers, not natives, do. “Ethnolexicography,” while unwieldy, at least is accurate. It refers to the study of spontaneous indigenous capacities to build semantic descriptions of words.

⁴ Doctoral fieldwork was conducted for over 24 months in Upper Morača Tribe in 1964-66. Methodological details are covered fully in Boehm (1972), and the list of cue words is provided there.

⁵ Minor discrepancies were accounted for mainly by disagreements as to whether similar minimal units given by different informants were semantically isomorphic, but in a third of the cases our cuts agreed perfectly (Boehm 1972:129-132). Papago and Navajo definitions obtained from single informants are similarly encapsulated (Casagrande and Hale 1967; Werner 1965, 1967), and reduction to definitional “atoms” has been practiced (in Papago) by Casagrande and Hale (1967) and, in English, by Davitz (1969).

⁶ Toward the end of an interview, informants may well begin to make unconscious assumptions about the nature of the domain under study, with some possible effect on responses. Further queries of the ethnographer, even if open-ended, may tend to “steer” subsequent responses somewhat. There is also a more general problem in that an entire native community may form an idea of the ethnographer’s purposes, which will bias responses. All such biases will be far weaker, however, where informants have not worked intensively with the ethnographer.

⁷ This method could be improved upon were informants asked to rank the items, as well, in terms of relative saliency for defining the cue word in question. A further improvement would be to place items on the list which never appeared in the original definitions, but which the investigator intuitively feels might belong there and were consistently omitted for some reason.

⁸ “*Na primer?*” was the query used, and translates almost literally into English as “For example?”

⁹ See Piers and Singer (1971) for problems of semantic imprecision in English with respect to key moral affect terms like “shame” and “guilt.” Also, see Davitz (1969) for a lexicographic study of affect terms in which frequencies for minimal units were obtained for a large sample of informants through use of a check list.

¹⁰ I do not deny that there is a great deal to be learned from conversation, poetry, novels, cinema, and impressionistic statements of clinicians, as well as from verbal responses and psychophysiological research, when affects are the subject of quantified scientific investigation.

¹¹ I use the term “tribal” in its most technical accepted sense to indicate that Montenegrin social organization still depends upon the patrilineal clan (*brastvo*) and the tribe (*pleme*) as explicitly recognized organizing principles. The *brastvo* is a not-necessarily-local group, having important residual corporate functions, while the *pleme*, today, is a localized cluster of clans sharing a strong ethnic identity based on its earlier history when it had autonomous political and military functions. It is maintained, at present, primarily by geographically isolating features of the Dinaric mountain system.

¹² This description of traditional Montenegrin morality as it persists today is based primarily upon Boehm (1972). However, I have relied upon Brkić (1961) and Djonović (1935) for ethnographic background on morality of the earlier traditional period. Neither of these sources deal directly with *kajanje*.

¹³ Morača, over four hours by foot from the nearest road, was the most isolated tribe in Montenegro in 1966.

¹⁴ These characterizations are paraphrased from natural definitions for the cue words *obraz* and *stid* (a synonym of *sramota*), as described in the author’s doctoral dissertation (Boehm 1972).

¹⁵ The authoritative lexicographic source for traditional Montenegrin folk terms is the lexicon published by Karadžić (1931 [1851]). There, the reflexive verb from which the noun *kajanje* is derived, is defined as follows:

kajati se: v.r. impf.: *bereuen*; *poenitet*.

Karadžić also refers the reader to *vajvati se*, which glosses as “regret,” but is a term I did not hear in the field. Normally, he lists close synonyms in Serbian directly within the definition and along with the German and Latin equivalents. Therefore, it may be assumed that there were no close synonyms for *kajanje*, in his estimation, because he restricted himself to glosses in those languages. Brkić (1961:145), in discussing blood vengeance, refers to two terms, built upon the root-morpheme *kaj-*, which mean to exact blood revenge: *nakajati*, and *pokajati*. These terms mean, in effect, “to make the other party regretful by inflicting homicide upon him.” Additionally, *pokajati* has a second meaning, translated by Brkić as “to repent.”

¹⁶ The raw definitions may be inspected in Boehm (1972), along with their translations; the raw minimal units are tabulated there as well (1972:155-166).

¹⁷ This query went beyond the usual open-ended request for an example. In this early interview, I allowed myself such license because I was still experimenting with elicitation techniques for amplification of interview materials.

¹⁸ The raw responses are open-ended, and the frequencies of minimal units are based upon a replicable system of coding and counting (Boehm 1972).

¹⁹ This is a rare example of a moral definition of *kajanje* in which concrete exemplification is given spontaneously, rather than being obtained through further elicitation.

²⁰ In eliciting this definition, the interviewer inadvertently neglected to ask for concrete exemplification.

²¹ This nonstandard query for exemplification was used by my field assistant in a moment of confusion. The query channels the informant’s response in the direction of being explicit about mental processes, which is fortunate for the present analysis.

²² Elsewhere (Boehm 1976, 1978, 1979, in press), I have made the case that the rational component in

human internal societal adaptation generally needs to be taken much more fully into account in ethnological analyses. This must not be construed, however, as a position which holds that blind organizational properties of social or moral systems do not contribute heavily to the patterning of moral behavior, since they obviously do. Furthermore, rationally calculated inputs may well have unanticipated positive or negative effects, or simply lack efficacy at times. But “static” theoretical approaches taken to the study of social functioning, or in describing systems of values, seem to let the rational component in native problem solving and decision making fall by the wayside as an object of ethnographic and ethnological neglect.

²³ Briggs (1970), in her outstanding analysis of Eskimo emotions, did considerable work with definition texts concerned with the meaning of emotion terms, many of which had moral implications. While she does not report any term comparable to *kajanje*, her study is instructive in terms of problems that may arise when lexicographic descriptions are built from relatively few definitions, and the cue terms are both maximally exotic and extremely polysemous. In particular, see her Appendix I on lexical meanings (1970:311-366).

²⁴ See Campbell (1972), and Boehm (1979), as well, for arguments that human “altruism” is caused by pressures placed upon individuals by the moral community.

²⁵ With respect to further interviewing, I could not follow this recommended step. Data were collected at the very end of fieldwork in 1966 and transcription was completed in the United States. When I returned in 1975, it was not possible to secure clearance for further research in Upper Morača Tribe. However, I do recommend that lexicographic data be checked in the field. This could lead to further interviewing in clarification of the relative semantic saliency of various minimal units; filling in the contexts of responses more fully; obtaining a greater number of exemplifications; and exploration of important points which the ethnographer suspects were omitted from definition responses due to their obviousness or for other reasons.

²⁶ Undeniably, many, and possibly most, ethnoscientific or more traditional descriptions of mental domains incorporate a reasonably good grasp of native units and categories on the part of the ethnographer. Two problems remain: (1) Is “reasonably good” really good enough for a discipline entrusted with recording the natural and cultural history of our species? (2) How does the professional anthropological community sort out its doubts, in evaluating the validity of various “descriptive data,” when these data are put to further use, as in cross-cultural comparison? I must exclude from this paper a more general discussion of what “science” should be, as anthropologists attempt to practice it. But no matter how such a definition was contrived, reliance upon more open-ended and public elicitation procedures would be salutary for the doing of ethnography. It would make sense, however, to streamline the presentation of such data beyond the point arrived at in this paper. One might include natural definition texts and minimal unit analyses in an appendix, as a public revelation of the “descriptive anchor,” which maximizes chances for a professional audience to evaluate the descriptive data directly, and to judge the analysis with respect to how well indigenous psychological realities are taken into account.

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